

Report

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Chris Firth-Eagland, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

**RECOMMENDED BY:
AND PREPARED BY:** Gordon R. Costie, Director Customer of Services

DATE: May 1, 2014

RE: Wildlife Management on HCA Conservation Lands

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

THAT the HCA staff recommends to the Board of Directors:

THAT Staff establish a Wildlife Management Committee to develop best Management Protocols for all future dealings with wildlife as it relates to all trapping, relocating or habitat modification on HCA conservation lands; and further

THAT the Chair and Vice-Chair, or designate sit on the Wildlife Management Committee; and further

THAT no trapping take place on HCA lands, other than live relocations, subject to the release and adoption of the Wildlife Management Committee best practices protocols.

BACKGROUND

The Hamilton Conservation Authority owns ~11,000 acres of conservation lands and wildlife trapping, relocating, and removal has occurred on these lands throughout our history of operations. These actions have included dealing with racoons, squirrels, skunks, Canada Geese, fish, muskrat, and beavers. To date, there is no formal policy or protocol for dealing with conflicts between wildlife and humans.

Trapping beavers on HCA lands has occurred at times on most conservation properties including the Beverly Swamp, Christie Lake, Dundas Valley, Crooks Hollow,

Confederation Park, and Fifty Point Conservation Areas. Most recently, the trapping of beavers at Fifty Point has come to the forefront. This activity was suspended immediately by the HCA Chairman and the CAO upon learning of animal trapping and from receiving email correspondence from a concerned Stoney Creek resident and customer to this conservation area. The email was directly distributed to all City of Hamilton Councillors, Hamilton Spectator, Stoney Creek News, CBC, and Facebook.

As a result, there has been very significant media coverage, email correspondence, voice mails, and public comments – both pro and con regarding animal trapping on HCA conservation lands.

Further investigation into the beaver issues at the Fifty Point trout pond revealed that animal trapping has been conducted as far back as the 1980's as reported by the current Manager. It has been a near annual animal control requirement at the trout pond since 2006 to keep beaver populations in check and to minimize damage and habitat destruction to the area.

The removal of beavers at Fifty Point have always been contracted and carried out by a professional trapper who is registered with the Ministry of Natural Resources. All trapping regulations, policies, and enforcement are administered by the MNR.

The current trapper at Fifty Point has been removing beavers from the trout pond for the past 6 years. He has amassed 30 years of experience of dealing humanely with beavers, racoons, skunks, coyotes and much more in his career. His work locations have included the Hamilton Conservation Authority, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, most all Municipalities and Townships in the Golden Horseshoe including the City of Hamilton.

The MNR has also been consulted through their Senior Fish and Wildlife Technical Specialist, Guelph District, who has confirmed the expansion of beaver populations across southern Ontario. Additional fact sheets can be found at the MNR website...www.mnr.on.ca See the attached information package forwarded by the MNR – Trapping in Ontario and Living with Beavers.

STAFF COMMENT

Staff are recommending that an interdisciplinary staff team be assembled to develop formal protocols that will take into full consideration best practices in dealing with wildlife on HCA lands. Staff will focus on practices that include insitu accommodations, habitat amendments, and live relocations. It is anticipated that the protocol developments will take several months to complete. Experts from various fields will be consulted and the protocols will be presented to the Conservation Advisory Board and the Board of Directors for adoption.

STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGE

The initiative refers directly to the HCA Strategic Plan 2014-2018:

- Strategic Goal #2 – Natural Heritage Conservation
 - Strategic Objective – lead by example in the environmentally sustainable management and maintenance of the organization.

AGENCY COMMENTS

Ministry of Natural Resources – see enclosed literature and refer to website - www.mnr.on.ca

LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

CONCLUSIONS

It is appropriate to instruct staff to complete a comprehensive review of all known significant conflicts between wildlife and the operations of our lands. The results of the review shall help the HCA be at the forefront of thoughtful, comprehensive management practices for resolving future issues.